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ABSTRACT

National normative data for 1986 from the 21st annual survey of college freshmen are presented as part of the Cooperative Institutional Research Program longitudinal study of American higher education. The 1986 norms were based on questionnaires completed by 204,491 freshmen entering 372 colleges and universities. Findings include: freshman participation in the Pell Grant program has declined by nearly half since 1980; only 16.9% of the freshmen entering college in fall 1986 received Pell Grants, while 25.4% received a Guaranteed Student Loan; one student in five (20.5%) reported family incomes under $20,000; there was rising freshman interest in education and business careers and a decline in the proportion of freshmen planning to pursue careers in computing, engineering, and research and in health-related fields; 70.6% of freshmen said that a major reason for attending college was to be able to make more money, compared to 49.9% in 1971; and virtually all student values having to do with altruism and social concern continued to decline. Student views on political and social issues and various controversial issues are also reported. (SW)

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COOPERATIVE INSTITUTIONAL
RESEARCH PROGRAM

American Council on Education/University of California, Los Angeles

1986 Freshman Survey Results

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COOPERATIVE INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH PROGRAM

American Council on Education/University of California, Los Angeles

1986 FRESHMAN SURVEY RESULTS

STUDENT AID DOWN DRAMATICALLY SINCE 1980

Freshman participation in the federally-funded Pell Grant program has declined by nearly half since 1980, according to the 21st annual survey of entering freshmen conducted jointly by UCLA and the American Council on Education. Only 16.9 percent of the freshmen entering college in Fall 1986 reported receiving Pell Grants, compared to 19.9 percent in 1985 and 31.5 percent in 1980. In contrast, one freshman in four (25.4 percent) has a Guaranteed Student Loan (GSL) this year, up from 23.0 percent last year and 20.9 percent in 1980.

The 1986 survey also points to rising freshman interest in education and business careers and a decline in the proportion of freshmen planning to pursue careers in computing and health-related fields.

"The data on federal grants and loans point to dramatic shifts in the way American college students and their families have had to cope with changing federal aid policies over the past six years," says UCLA Professor Alexander W. Astin, director of the study. "Changes in federal aid eligibility regulations have contributed to a steady decline in the proportion of freshmen participating in the Pell Grant program and rapidly rising dependence on loans."

Astin adds that students who receive loans may not fare as well in college as their peers. "Beyond the effects that these reductions may have on the decisions of poor students to attend college," says Prof. Astin, "research on student persistence and degree completion suggests that heavy reliance on loans may contribute to the decision to drop out of college."

The decline in student aid eligibility may also be reflected in the family income levels of the freshmen entering college this year. In 1980, the peak year of aid eligibility under the Middle Income Student Assistance Act (MISSA) legislation, two students in five (40.7 percent) reported family incomes under $20,000, compared to one student in five (20.5 percent) in 1986. Additionally, the proportion of freshmen reporting family incomes under $30,000 has fallen by nearly half over the past six years, from 68.1 percent in 1980 to 36.6 percent this year.

"These shifts in family income are too sharp to be attributed solely to the impact of inflation," says Dr. Kenneth C. Green, associate director of the study. "Recent changes in federal aid eligibility seem to have affected the college-going decisions of large numbers of students from low- and middle-income families."

The 1986 survey points to rising freshman interest in education careers. This year 7.3 percent of the freshmen expressed interest in elementary or secondary teaching careers, up from 6.2 percent in 1985 and substantially above the low point of 4.7 percent in 1982. "Students have begun to discover education again," says Astin, commenting on the fourth consecutive year of increasing interest in education careers. He notes that a strong job market in education, coupled with competitive salaries for new teachers, have helped to fuel this increased interest.

"Given the growing demand for teachers, this represents a significant gain and promising trend when compared to the interest levels recorded in the early 1980s," says Prof. Astin. "However, it is still below the level needed to off-set the current and projected shortage of elementary and secondary teachers, and it is far below the levels recorded in the late 1960s when over 20 percent of the entering freshmen (and more than one-third of the freshman women) planned to pursue teaching careers."

In contrast to rising interest in education, student interest in computing, engineering, and research careers has declined significantly in recent years. Computer careers (programmer, systems analyst) have shown the most dramatic drop, to 3.5 percent on the 1986 survey from 4.4 percent in 1985 and 8.8 percent in 1982 (a 60 percent decline in just four years). The drop in engineering, to 9.7 percent in 1986 from 10.0 percent in 1985 and 12.0 percent in 1982, while not as sharp as in computing, is still significant and reflects a one-fifth decline in the proportion of freshmen interested in engineering careers over the past four years. Interest in research careers, while unchanged this year at 1.4 percent, is down from 1.7 percent in 1980 and has fallen by more than half since 1973, when 3.1 percent of all freshmen expressed interest in pursuing research careers.

Health-related careers also showed declines this year. The proportion of students planning to pursue medical degrees (MD, DO, DDS, DVM) dropped to 5.6 percent this year, from 6.0 percent in 1985, 6.4 percent in 1980, and the peak of 7.4 percent in 1973. Nursing also declined this year to 2.7 percent, from 3.3 percent in 1985 and 4.4 percent in 1983; nursing has fallen by nearly half from the peak of 5.1 percent recorded in 1974.

Business continues to be the most popular career among college freshmen, rising to an all-time high of 24.1 percent in 1986, up from 23.9 percent in 1985, and more than double the 1966 figure of 11.6 percent. "The continuing popularity of business careers," says Prof. Astin, " is consistent with the changes in student values we have been observing over the same time period." Student endorsement of "being very well-off financially" as a "very important" or "essential" goal in life continued its steady climb to an all-time high of 73.2 percent this year (up from 70.9 percent last year and only 39.1 percent in 1970). Similarly, more freshmen than ever say that a major reason for attending college is "to be able to make *(see page 2)*

more money" (70.6 percent, up from 69.7 percent last year and only 49.9 percent in 1971).

In contrast, virtually all student values having to do with altruism and social concern continued to decline in the 1986 survey. Record lows were recorded for student interest in "helping others in difficulty" (57.2 percent, down from 63.4 percent in 1985 and 68.5 percent in 1966), "promoting racial understanding" (27.2 percent this year, down from 32.0 percent last year and 30.4 percent in 1975), "participating in community action programs" (18.5 percent, compared to 22.8 percent last year and 30.4 percent in 1975) and "participating in programs to clean up the environment" (15.9 percent in 1986, down from 20.3 percent last year and 44.6 percent in 1972). The sharpest value decline in recent years has been in student support for "developing a meaningful philosophy of life." Support for this value fell to its lowest point in the history of the survey in 1986 (40.6 percent, compared to 43.3 percent last year and 82.9 percent in 1967).

Students' views on various controversial issues continue to show a mix of liberal and conservative trends. On the conservative side, support for abolishing capital punishment declined to its lowest point in the history of the survey (25.4 percent, down from 26.6 percent last year and 57.6 percent in 1971). Support for legalizing marijuana also continued its precipitous decline to only 21.3 percent of the 1986 freshmen (down from 21.8 percent last year and 52.9 percent at its peak in 1977). Also, for the first time in the survey's history, the majority of freshmen (52.2 percent, up from 47.9 percent last year) support laws prohibiting homosexual behavior. "As freshman attitudes on this issue have been fairly stable (between 46 and 48 percent) since this question was first added to the survey in 1976," says Dr. Green, "this sudden increase in student support for laws against homosexuality might well be attributed to the widespread public attention currently focused on AIDS."

Other data from the 1986 survey suggest that students are more liberal than ever in their views on a number of political and social issues. Support for school busing as a means of integrating public schools continues to rise, reaching its all-time high in 1986 of 56.1 percent (up from 54.4 percent last year and 37.0 percent in 1976). Record highs were also recorded in student support for legalized abortion (58.6 percent this year compared to 54.9 percent in 1985), for a national health care plan (61.2 percent, compared to 60.5 percent in 1985 and 54.8 percent in 1980), and for the proposition that people should live together before getting married (51.1 percent this year, up from 47.4 percent last year and 42.7 percent in 1981). At the same time, student support for the notion that "the activities of married women are best confined to the home and family" reached an all-time low in 1986 (20.3 percent, down from 22.4 percent last year and 56.7 percent in 1967). Men, however, are twice as likely as women to support the proposition about a home role for married women (27.0 percent for versus 14.3 percent).

Beyond individual issues, student self-identification of their general political posture showed a slight movement toward the left in 1986, continuing a trend begun in Fall 1982. This year 24.0 percent of the entering students identified themselves as being "liberal" or "far left" politically, up from 22.4 percent in 1985 and from the low of 19.7 percent in 1981. This increase was accompanied by a slight decline in the proportion of freshmen who identified themselves as being "conservative" or "far right" (20.0 percent, down from an all-time high of 20.9 percent in 1985).

High school grades rose slightly in 1986, suggesting that grade inflation in the high schools may be recurring after six years (1979-1984) of relative stability in the proportion of entering freshmen reporting A/A- high school grade averages. Better than one freshman in five (22.5 percent) reported high school grades in the A/A- range this year, up from 20.7 percent percent in 1985. The 1986 figure for A/A- students is still below the peak of 23.3 percent recorded in 1978, but is also well above the low of 12.5 percent registered in 1969. The proportion of entering freshmen with C averages declined slightly in 1986 to 19.8 percent from 20.4 percent in 1985. These figures are well above the all-time low of 17.3 recorded in 1978, but also below the all-time C average high of 31.6 percent observed in 1969.

The 1986 national survey is based on questionnaires completed by 290,249 freshmen entering 552 American colleges and universities. Of these, 204,491 questionnaires from 372 institutions were used to compute the 1986 national norms. The normative data presented here have been statistically adjusted to represent the nation's total population of approximately 1.66 million first-time, full-time entering freshmen. Freshmen are followed-up at regular intervals to assess changes that occur during the undergraduate years. Copies of the survey, titled *The American Freshman: National Norms for Fall 1986*, are available for $12.95 from the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA's Graduate School of Education, 405 Hilgard Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90024.

The Cooperative Institutional Research Program

The Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) is a national longitudinal study of American higher education. Established in 1966 by the American Council on Education (ACE), the CIRP is now the nation's largest and longest continuing empirical study of American colleges and college students. Since 1966, some 6 million students, 100,000 faculty, and almost 1,300 institutions have participated in CIRP surveys. The annual CIRP survey of entering college freshmen is now administered through UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute, under the continuing sponsorship of the American Council on Education.

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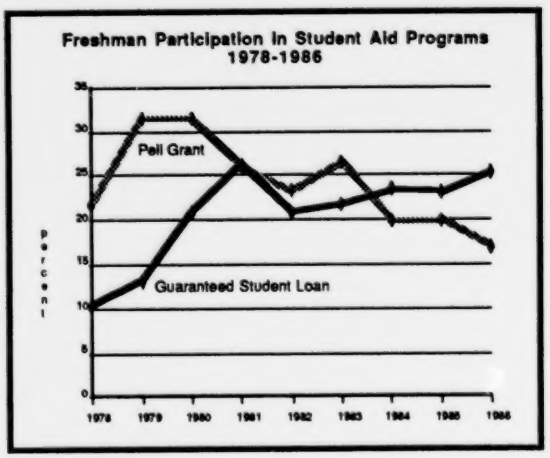
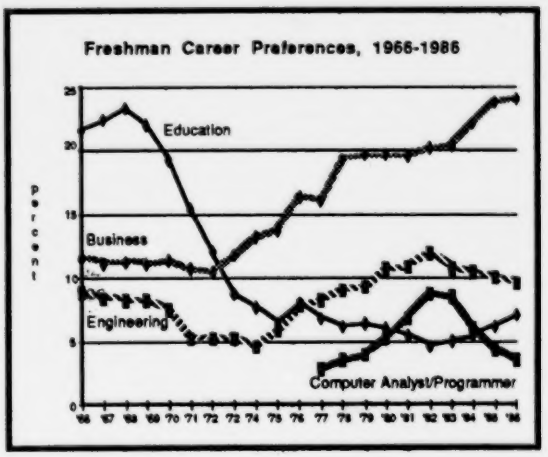
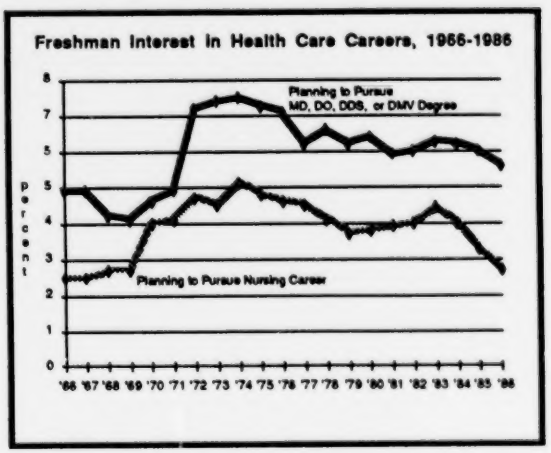
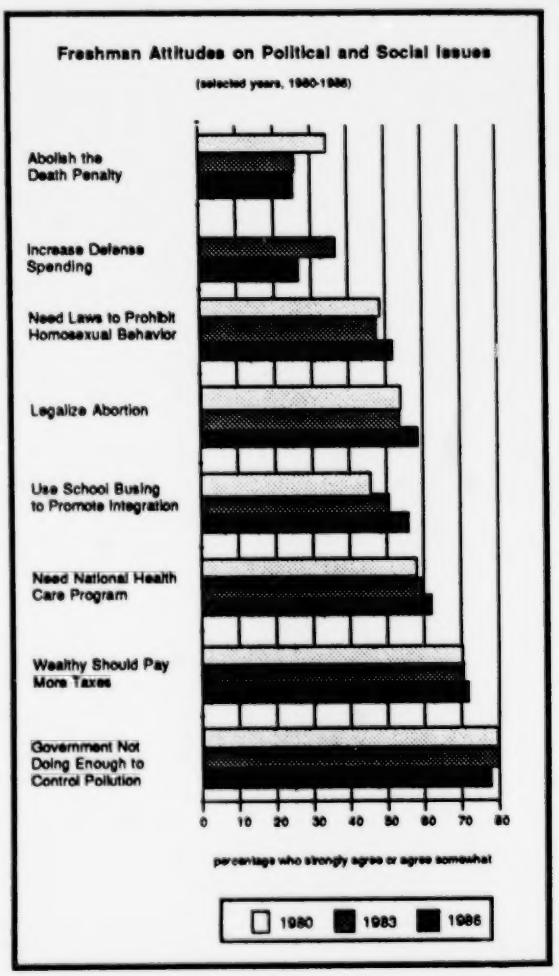
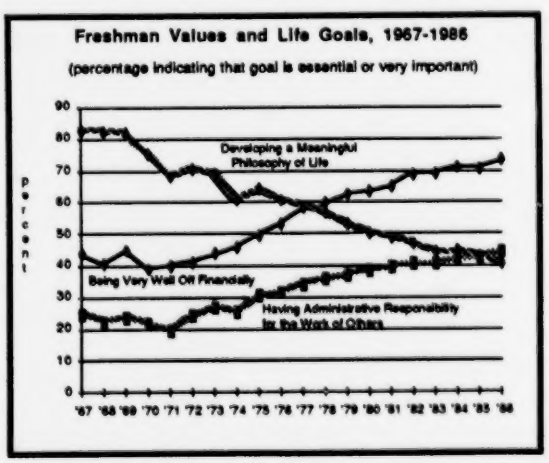
1986 Freshman Survey Data






Freshman Interest in Health Care Careers, 1966-1986
Planning to Pursue
MD, DO, DDS, or DMV Degree
Planning to Pursue Nursing Career
percent


Freshman Attitudes on Political and Social Issues
(selected years, 1980-1986)
Abolish the Death Penalty
Increase Defense Spending
Need Laws to Prohibit Homosexual Behavior
Legalize Abortion
Use School Busing to Promote Integration
Need National Health Care Program
Wealthy Should Pay More Taxes
Government Not Doing Enough to Control Pollution
percentage who strongly agree or agree somewhat
1980
1983
1986


Freshman Values and Life Goals, 1967-1986
(percentage indicating that goal is essential or very important)
Developing a Meaningful Philosophy of Life
Being Very Well Off Financially
Having Administrative Responsibility for the Work of Others
percent